

THE ENEMIES OF THE CHURCH

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CHAPTER ONE

THE FIRST ENEMY OF THE CHURCH: HEATHENISM OR PAGANISM OR IDOLATRY

THE story is told of a Western-bound train, flying along with lightning speed: the time was shortly after sunset. Suddenly a crash was heard: the train stopped. "What is the matter?" the passengers asked one another. A huge owl, dazzled by the glare, had struck against the reflector in front of the engine, shattered the glass, and tried to extinguish the light, and a great bull had set its head against the engine, to stop the train. The lamp was rekindled, the engine sped on, but the stupid owl and the obstinate bull were cast aside, dead, and left to rot, and be devoured by wild beasts. An Irishman, on seeing them, exclaimed: "I admire your courage, but condemn your judgment."

This train may be likened to the holy Catholic Church, speeding on, on her heaven-sent mission, to lead men to heaven by the light of her holy doctrine. The foolish owl, the enemy of light and the friend of

darkness, represents Lucifer, who, as the foe of God, and of the light of God's holy religion, has always been endeavoring to extinguish the light of the true religion. The bull represents the kings and emperors, the heretics and members of secret societies, whom Lucifer uses to stop, if possible, the progress of the Catholic Church, the bearer of the light of faith. Although it is hard, in a certain sense, not to admire the courage of Lucifer's agents, yet we cannot but condemn their judgment, their folly and wickedness, in opposing the work of God, and bringing down upon themselves the everlasting curse of the Almighty.

Satan has, indeed, been engaged, from the beginning of the world, in doing all in his power to entice men away from God, and to be himself worshipped, instead of the Creator. The introduction, establishment, persistence, and power of the various cruel, revolting superstitions of the ancient heathen world, or of pagan nations in modern times, are nothing but the work of the devil. They reveal a more than human power. God permitted Satan to operate upon man's morbid nature, as a deserved punishment upon the Gentiles for their hatred of truth, and their apostasy from the primitive religion of the holy patriarchs and prophets. Men, left to themselves, to human nature alone, however low they might be prone to descend, never could descend so low as to worship wood and stone, four footed beasts, and creeping things. To do this needs Satanic delusion.

Our Divine Saviour, Jesus Christ, came to break the power of the devil over mankind; He came to banish idolatry, the worship of the devil, from among men, and lead them back to the worship and service of His heavenly Father by His holy example and divine

doctrine. But no sooner had He begun to teach men His saving doctrine, than Satan opposed Him. Satan is called, in Holy Scripture, the father of lies. From the beginning of the world he has tried to misrepresent every religious truth. He practised this black art in paradise; and so unhappily successful was he in it, that ever since he has practised it, in order to propagate error and vice among men. When our Saviour began to preach His holy religion, Satan practised his black art, even in the presence of Christ Himself. By malicious men, the ministers of Satan, Christ was contradicted and misrepresented in His doctrine; for, instead of being believed, He was held up to the people as a blasphemer, for teaching that He was the Son of God, as the impious Caiphas declared Him to be, saying, "He hath blasphemed; He is guilty of death." (Matthew chapter 26: verse 65)

He was misrepresented in his reputation, for he was noble, of royal lineage, and yet was despised. "Is not this the carpenter's son?" (Matthew chapter 13: verse 55) He is wisdom itself, and was represented as an ignorant man: "How doth this man know letters, having never learned?" (John chapter 7: verse 17). He was represented as a false prophet: "And they blindfolded him, and smote his face, saying: Prophecy who is this that struck thee?" (Luke chapter 22: verse 64) He was represented as a madman: "He is mad, why hear you him?" (John chapter 10: verse 20). He was represented as a winebibber, a glutton, and a friend of sinners: "Behold a man that is a glutton and a drinker of wine, a friend of publicans and sinners." (Luke chapter 22: verse 34). He was represented as a sorcerer: "By the prince of the devils He casteth out

devils." (Matthew chapter 9: verse 34.) He was represented as a heretic and possessed person: "Do we not say well of thee, that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? " (John chapter 8: verse 48).

In a word, Jesus was represented to the people as so bad and notorious a man, that no trial was deemed necessary to condemn him, as the Jews said to Pilate: "If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him up to thee." (John chapter 18: verse 30). If ever infamous calumny was earned to excess, it was undoubtedly in the case of our Saviour, "who knew not sin," who had never uttered a deceitful word, who "did all things well," and who "passed His life in doing good, and healing all kinds of infirmities."

The reason why those malicious men misrepresented Christ to the multitude, reporting light to be darkness, and God to be the devil, was, that thus they might frighten the people from embracing the truth and following the Son of God. Christ permitted Satan's ministers to calumniate him in the worst manner, and to condemn him to the infamous death of the cross. They saw him die upon the cross; they saw him buried, and thought that his doctrine would soon be forgotten. Their malice seemed to have triumphed over Christ: and a triumph indeed there was — not for them — but for Christ and His Church.

When winter buries nature in its icy tomb, it seems to celebrate a triumph over the beauty of nature. But, whilst nature sleeps in that tomb the silent, dreary sleep of death, gentle spring watches, and waits, and weeps, till at last a glad smile shines through her tears;

and soon her tears are dried, for the grave is burst asunder, and nature rises and lives again, strong, and bright, and beautiful.

Thus, too, did the holy Church, the Spouse of Christ, kneel beside the tomb of her heavenly Bridegroom. Bearing on her brow His royal seal, and in her hands His gifts of power, she watched beside His grave, and prayed, and wept. But soon her tears were dried, for Jesus rose, and lived again, strong, and bright, and beautiful, and her heart was filled with joy, and she was endowed anew with treasures of immortal life. Our Divine Saviour said, unless the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it shall remain alone, it shall bear no fruit; but, if it die, then it shall bear fruit a hundred-fold. Such, He seems to say, is the brief history of my life on earth; such is the history of my Spouse, — my holy Church. Such, too, is the history of my faithful followers, in every age and in every clime. Always slandered, hated, persecuted, yet always victorious; always dying, yet ever living; crucified, buried in the grave, yet rising gloriously; triumphing over death and hell, and bearing fruit a hundred-fold unto life everlasting. I was hated, persecuted, and put to death, because I taught truth, and public and private morality. My Church teaches the same. But Satan constantly tempts the wicked to rebel against the truth, and therefore is she assailed, in every age, by the enemies of truth. Knowing this, I have declared that the lot of my followers in this world would for ever be one of persecution; that wicked men would rise up in every age, thinking that to persecute and oppress God's people was to do God's work.

"Beware of men. For they will deliver you up in councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues. And you shall be brought before governors and before kings, for my sake, for a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. The brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the son; and the children shall rise up against their parents, and shall put them to death, and you shall be hated by all men, for my name's sake; but he that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved." (Matthew chapter 9: verse 22). "If you had been of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember my word that I said to you: The servant is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." (John chapter 15: verses 19 and 20). "Yea, the hour cometh that, whosoever killeth you, will think that he doth a service to God." (John chapter 16: verse 2). "And I say to you: Be not afraid of them who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But fear ye Him who, after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell. Yea, I say to you, fear Him." (Luke chapter 12: verses 4 and 5).

This prediction of our Lord has always come, and always will come, true. But, as Christ predicted the persecutions of His followers, so also did He foretell that they would conquer, as He conquered. The life of Christ was a transition from the deepest suffering to the loftiest triumph and glory. The Church, whose life is that of Christ, passes constantly from suffering to glory, and from glory back again to suffering, until at last her final triumph will come, when suffering shall be no more. Persecutions, therefore, though they must come, must end, and end in the triumph of the Church.

No sooner had the apostles begun to announce the Gospel, than they met with the same treatment which their Divine Master had received. The people were stirred up against St. Stephen by misrepresentation, because they were told that "he had spoken blasphemous words against Moses and against God." (Acts chapter 6: verse 11). They were also stirred up against St. Paul, because they were told that he was " a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition amongst all the Jews throughout the world." (Acts chapter 24: verse 5). Neither did those calumnies, those wicked misrepresentations, stop here. Jesus Christ said: "The disciple is not above the master; if they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of the household ? " (Matthew chapter 10: verse 24).

In these words our Lord not only foretold what was to happen to his followers then present, but also to the faithful who were to come after them, and to his Church in future ages; so that, though they should be ever so just to God and their neighbor, upright in their ways, and live in the fear of God and the observance of His laws, yet must they be reviled and hated by the world, made a byword to the people, have the repute of seducers, and be a scandal to all nations. Has not this come true in all ages? See what was the state of Christians in the primitive times. Their lives were holy and pure, and yet it is almost impossible to believe in what contempt they were held. Tertullian tells us that, so malicious were the slanders scattered abroad concerning the manner of their worship. Their whole religion being described not only to be mere folly and foppery, but also to be grounded on most hellish principles, and full of impieties. The heathens believed a man could not make profession of Christianity without being tainted with all sorts of crimes, without being an

enemy to princes, to the laws, to good manners, and to nature itself. Thus, the Christian religion was made wholly infamous amongst the heathens, was condemned and detested by the greater part, and most bloody persecutions were raised against the Christians, whilst they were guilty of no other crime than that of adhering to the truth. And those calumnies, those false accusations, were invented to cry down the Christian religion. Hence Tertullian was driven to write his "Apology," wherein he showed to the world that Christianity was nothing like what the heathens imagined it to be; that idolatry, superstition, impiety, cruelty, treachery, conspiracy, and all other crimes against nature and grace, were condemned and reprobated by their doctrine. He showed that these crimes were only the malicious inventions and reports of the heathen priests, who, being unable to withstand the force of the Christian religion, had no other way to preserve themselves in repute, and keep the people in their error, than by a hideous mask, an abominable scheme of religion, which holding forth to the world, they cried out: "This is the religion of Christians; these are their principles; behold their ignorance, their stupidity, their profaneness; behold their insolence, their villanies, — a people insufferable in a commonwealth, enemies to their country and their prince!" Thus, representing the Christian religion as utterly monstrous, they brought odium upon as many as owned the Christian name, and condemned them for follies and crimes that existed nowhere, except in their wicked imagination. Edicts breathing destruction against the Christians, and those who believed in their doctrine, were published, Christians were seized, executioners were fatigued with the work of death, and the most barbarous tortures were devised, to banish Christianity from the face

of the earth. Torments, which only hell could have inspired, were employed to strike terror into the hearts of the Christians. They were nailed to the cross, they were thrown to wild beasts, they were besmeared with pitch, tied to stakes, and then set on fire, to light up the streets of pagan Rome. But their courage rose with their sufferings. With a holy enthusiasm they showed themselves before the tyrants, and boldly confessed the name of Jesus; mothers caught up their little babes from the cradle, and, bearing them in their arms before the heathen judges, they cried aloud, "We are Christians, we will die for Christ." The bridegroom and the bride put on their festal robes, and hastened together to the scene of death. United in heart, united in faith, they wished to be united also in death, and to enter together to the marriage feast of the Lamb.

Manly warriors cast aside their arms, and gave their lives for Christ. Tender, noble virgins hastened joyfully to die for their bridegroom, Jesus. So great was the havoc wrought by these early persecutions among the children of the Church, that her martyrs alone amount to thirty thousand for every day in the year, — martyrs whose blood, as a holy pontiff remarks, was like the chosen seed, which perishes only to produce fruits a hundred-fold.

The Church was crushed. Her tyrant oppressors rejoiced that she was annihilated. But the virgin was not dead, she was only sleeping. The grain of wheat was cast into the ground; it was dead, apparently, but it soon took root, rose again, fresh and vigorous, and brought forth fruit a hundred-fold. The blood of the martyrs became the seed of new Christians; the pagan tyrant cut down a single blade of wheat,

and a hundred others sprung up in its stead; and where Christianity seemed utterly destroyed, there it soon celebrated a glorious triumph.

The Catholic Church arose from the grave; she came forth from the catacombs, strong and beautiful as ever, wearing on her brow the diadem of a spiritual empire, that shall never fail till the very elements dissolve and disappear. She spoke, and at her heavenly voice the Jew laid aside his national pride, and embraced the Gentile as a brother, he gave up his fond hope of an earthly Messiah and an earthly kingdom, and bent the knee before that very Jesus whom he had crucified. The Greek abandoned his halls, his academies, and his worldly wisdom, to become the disciple of the fishermen of Galilee, and to learn from them how to be "a fool" for Christ's sake. The Roman turned his back upon the Capitol, and received, with the docility of a child, the doctrine of humility and peace to all men. The heathen rejected his false gods, — the gods he had inherited from his forefathers, that allowed him to gratify every selfish desire of his heart; he embraced the religion of the cross, — the religion of purity, of self-denial, of unbounded charity. The cross, the symbol of Christ's kingdom, soon rose triumphantly over the cities of Antioch and Alexandria. The cross towered above Athens, the proud seat of worldly wisdom. The cross shone brightly over sensual Corinth; and the prince of the apostles bore the cross to Rome, and planted it beside the throne of the Caesars. Proud Rome, so long drunk with the blood of the martyrs, at length bowed her haughty neck to the sweet yoke of Jesus, and the Roman Caesars laid down their glittering crown and sceptre, as an humble offering, at the foot of the cross.

Christianity spread with all the swiftness of divine truth. It soon passed beyond the uttermost ends of the far-extended Roman empire, so that Tertullian could say, with truth, that nearly all the nations of the then known world were united in one religion, — the religion of the cross.

Constantine the Great fought, before the walls of Rome, the battle which was to decide for ever the fate of paganism. Constantine knew that his enemy, Maxentius, was far superior in numbers, and he felt that no graven image of stone or wood could help him in his hour of need. He, therefore, turned his heart to the living and mighty God. He called upon the God of the Christians, of whose charity and goodness he had heard so much; and God rewarded his confidence, and granted his prayer. A blazing cross appeared in the heavens, surrounded by the inscription, *En touto nika* which in Greek means "In this sign thou shalt conquer." Constantine obeyed the voice of God. He struck off the Roman eagle, and raised, in its stead, the holy cross. As the morning sun arose, its rays fell upon the golden eagle, the symbol of pagan Rome, but, opposed to it, glittered, for the first time, the cross, — the standard of victory; and before that day's sun had set, paganism was vanquished, Christianity triumphant, and Constantine bore the blazing cross, in triumph, through the open gates of Rome, to plant it upon the Capitol of the Caesars. Thus the Roman persecutions ended in the crushing of the blind owl and bull, — the pagan power, — and the supplanting of it by a Christian empire.